



Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General



Why We Did This Review

The Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 gave the Census Bureau an additional \$210 million to help cover spiraling 2010 decennial costs stemming from the bureau's problematic efforts to automate major field operations, major flaws in its cost-estimating methods, and other issues. The Act's explanatory statement required the bureau to submit to Congress a detailed plan and timeline of decennial milestones and expenditures, as well as a quantitative assessment of associated program risks, within 30 days.

OIG must provide quarterly reports on the bureau's progress against this plan. This report's objective was to provide an update of activities and operations, identify budget and spending issues, and examine risks to the 2010 Census program.

Background

First conducted in 1790, decennial censuses have fulfilled a vital constitutional mandate. The 2010 Census enumerated more than 300 million people. The results provide important data that will guide Congressional apportionment and redistricting, as well as the distribution of more than \$400 billion of government funding annually.

The 2010 Census represents the largest peacetime mobilization in American history. For this massive undertaking, Census integrated 44 separate operations (with a total of some 9,400 program- and project-level activities). Temporary bureau management staff ran 494 local offices and managed over 600,000 temporary workers, all in order to contact 134 million U.S. households. Census completed the count on time and matched the 2000 decennial's final mail participation rate of 74 percent.

2010 Census: Quarterly Report to Congress

January 2011 (OIG-11-017-I)

What We Found

This report covers 2010 Census activities for two quarterly periods, from April through September 2010, and includes more current information where available. We address the status of the Census budget and spending of Recovery Act funds; the status of OIG field observations, especially for Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU) and Vacant Delete Check (VDC) operations, and how paper-based operations control system (PBOCS) problems affected them; and risk management activities, including enumerator safety and an allegation of improprieties at one local Census office. In addition, we report the findings of other OIG reviews during this period. More specifically, we focused on:

- **2010 Census Costs.** Although spending remained under budget (\$7.4 billion projected; about \$5.5 billion spent), Census did not adequately implement our recommendation to control wage, travel, and training costs. Our two previous quarterly reports highlighted lower cost estimates offset by higher spending, which were obscured by financial management reporting that lacked transparency. Here we report that the trend continued, due to inadequate planning and insufficient tracking. Additionally, our analysis of travel and training costs reveals inefficiencies.
- **OIG Field Observations.** IT systems instability caused higher costs and may have negatively affected data quality. Our February and May quarterly reports raised questions about the viability of PBOCS, Census's primary tool for field workload planning and reporting. Our field observations confirmed the expected: increased cost and potential data errors because of PBOCS' inadequacies. We describe how the system adversely affected NRFU and its quality control component, the Field Verification operation that followed NRFU, and the completion of the Update/Enumerate operation.

Previous OIG reports tracked early field operations (before April 1, 2010) and NRFU. OIG oversight of the 2010 Census continued with NRFU and VDC. We observed some enumerators not following important procedures, such as leaving notice of visits and following questionnaire scripts. During VDC, we also observed respondents' unwillingness to answer interview questions, which affected production. Finally, we explain how Census map quality needs improvement.

- **Census Employee Safety.** Our review of the Census field notes and incident reports indicated that not all threats and other criminal conduct directed at enumerators generated either a formal review or an enforcement action. NRFU highlighted many instances of Census employee risk at the hands of respondents; reports detailed hundreds of instances of threats as well as physical, verbal, or sexual attacks. We suggest that the Census Bureau, the Department of Commerce, law enforcement agencies, and Congress collaborate to develop an appropriate solution that explicitly addresses enumerator safety.
- **Risk Management Activities.** Census's Risk Review Board (RRB) continued to oversee risk management activities and modify its risk register. However, the RRB made little progress in finalizing outstanding contingency plans. The board's inability to prioritize the completion of remaining contingency plans—especially with one of the risks rated "high" throughout the major decennial operations—was of serious concern.
- **Other OIG Census Reviews.** During this period, we examined contract labor costs; investigated important whistleblower accusations at a Brooklyn, New York, local Census office; and looked at the bureau's process for handling fingerprint checks of potential hires.

This report does not provide recommendations. We will publish a synopsis and final report of all OIG field operations and evaluations of the 2010 Census in the spring of 2011.